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ABSTRACT

It is in the intellectual context of current attacks on liberalism that multiculturalism gains its currency as a progressive movement. Liberal theorists argue that multiculturalism can be justified as a quintessential liberal principle that entitles ethnic minorities to certain cultural rights that may otherwise be denied to individuals "qua" individuals. Multiculturalism is interpreted one way in Canada and another way in the United States. Regardless of whether people use multiculturalism in a narrow or expansive sense, multiculturalism is widely accepted as the framework within which social justice is to be negotiated in a pluralistic society. Among the most concrete signs of the combined impact of the political correctness debate and multiculturalism is the intense politicization of curriculum reform in institutions of higher learning in recent years, particularly in the United States. Beyond the postmodernist rhetoric, there is a growing recognition that the traditional curriculum of liberal education is too focused on Western civilizations, often at the expense of other non-Western civilizations. Against these changes, this paper attempts to go beyond the canon debate. The paper is most interested not in what is taught, but in how it is taught. It argues that it is the moral obligation of teachers to ensure that the exposure to a variety of cultural traditions and perspectives is an ongoing process that is not confined to a particular course or program. It does not favor an approach which adopts multiculturalism as the form of critical pedagogy. (Contains 40 notes.) (BT)

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Multiculturalism as a Pedagogical Approach

by

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I

After more than a decade of culture wars on American campuses, it is reasonable to say that minimally, the so-called "political correctness" debate has sparked concerns among those in the humanities and social science regarding the political implications of their scholarship and their teaching.[1] This is by no means to suggest that every academic is now convinced of the postmodernist view that there is no such thing as objective truth or that the pursuit of knowledge is a political act. Rather, what the debate has done is to question the legacy of the Enlightenment as one of progressiveness which ought to be embraced by all of humanity. In short, no liberal these days should be surprised to hear that liberalism is an imperialistic and oppressive construct based on Eurocentric values rather than a set of universal principles which all rational human beings can agree to and abide by.

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[1] For a good overview of the debate, see Paul Berman, "Introduction: The Debate and Its Origins," in *Debating P.C.: The Controversy Over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, ed. P. Berman (New York: Laurel, 1992), 1-26. The book is a collection of essays by various prominent participants in those earlier years of the debate.

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Of course this is not the first time in history that liberalism is under attack. Even as late as the 1980s it was Marxism which carried out the main assault. But as Foucault reminds us, the Marxist critique of the Western capitalist societies as ideological is limited in that ultimately Marxism is predicated on the assumption that there is "Truth" once we get beyond the illusion of capitalism.[2] Interestingly, many believe that the current attack on liberalism is simply an effort by the radicals of the sixties to reinvent themselves in times when Marxism has lost all its credibility as a political alternative to liberalism. For the skeptics the current intellectual battle is no more than a sabotage by discredited Marxists to bring everyone down the drain. In short what we are witnessing is a lethal mix of Nietzschean-inspired nihilism carried out with the zeal of Marxism-Leninism.[3]

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[2] Foucault's critique of the Marxist concept of ideology can be found in a number of places. See, for example, "Truth and Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 118, 126.

[3] This view is most notably articulated by Roger Kimball is his widely read book, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998). In the introduction to this revised edition, Kimball notes, "for the gender-race-class cadres that now dominate the discussion in the university, all social, artistic, and intellectual life must be subjected to a battery of political tests. This marks what we might call the *Sovietization of intellectual life*..." See *Tenured Radicals*, p. xv; emphasis added.

It is in this intellectual context that multiculturalism gains its currency as a progressive movement. Liberal theorists, most notably Will Kymicka, argue that multiculturalism can be justified as a quintessential liberal principle which entitles ethnic minorities to certain cultural rights that may otherwise be denied to individuals *qua* individuals. By confining multiculturalism to ethnicity, Kymlick's theory is very much in line with the policy of multiculturalism as implemented in Canada.[4] On the other hand, in the United States multiculturalism tends to be treated as the equivalent of identity-based politics. Under this rubric multiculturalism incorporates the full array of marginalized groups which are not necessarily characterized by a shared culture based on ethnic and/or racial origins. But regardless of whether one uses multiculturalism in the narrow or expansive sense, multiculturalism is now widely accepted as the framework within which social justice is to be negotiated in a pluralistic society.

Among the most concrete signs of the combined impact of the "political correctness" debate and multiculturalism is the intense politicization of curriculum reform in institutions of higher learning in recent years, especially in the United States. Beyond the postmodernist rhetoric propagated mostly by the English departments, there is certainly a growing recognition that the traditional curriculum of liberal education is too focussed on Western civilizations, and often at the expense of other non-Western civilizations. To the extent that in the year 2000, 62% of the 543 institutions surveyed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities indicated that they have a diversity requirement, there is no doubt that the canon debate has made

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[4] Canada, *Multiculturalism Act* (1988).

some concrete impact.[5]

[5] Elizabeth Greene, "Most Colleges Require Diversity Education, Survey Finds," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 3 November 2000, A16.

Against these changes, this paper is an attempt to go beyond the canon debate. The question that I am most interested in is not what we teach, but *how* we teach. I am fully in favour of the idea that our students should be exposed to a variety of cultural traditions and perspectives. In fact I argue that it is our moral obligation as teachers to ensure that this exposure is an ongoing process that is not confined to a particular course outline or program. In this sense, I am a multiculturalist. However, I want to distinguish my approach at the onset from those who have adopted multiculturalism as *the* form of "critical pedagogy." Proponents of this approach state that all "critical educational theorists" are "united in their attempts to empower the powerless and to transform social inequalities and injustices."[6] In contrast, my goal is rather more circumscribed. For me, to learn about others is to understand what humanity has in common with all its complexities and nuances. That commonality is the basis upon which we develop our ability to both think and judge critically. This to me is the purpose of education and hence, my teaching. Multiculturalism as a pedagogical approach is to serve such a purpose.

II

I shall begin by introducing myself briefly. I was born and raised in Hong Kong, where I received the colonial version of British education in a school runned by a French convent from

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[6] Peter McLaren, with Henry A. Giroux, "Radical pedagogy as cultural politics: beyond the discourse of critique and anti-utopianism," in McLaren, *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture: Oppositional Politics in a Postmodern Age* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 29. Both authors are self-professed practitioners of "critical pedagogy." My research of the literature indicates that both are very prolific writers who have clearly shaped the thinking of the subject in significant ways. McLaren is currently professor of education at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California at Los Angeles. Giroux is professor of education at Pennsylvania State University.

kindergarten to matriculation. In 1980 I moved to Canada with my family as immigrants. I started my undergraduate education at the University of Toronto and continued with graduate studies at Princeton University. All my degrees are in politics. I started my first academic job in 1990 and since 1991, I have been teaching in the Department of Political Science at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. Political theory is my main teaching field. But I also teach a course in Chinese politics. Regarding the latter, I always make a point of telling my students why I am their instructor given the propensity these days to base knowledge on identity. My teaching qualification comes from the fact that comparative politics with a focus on China was my second field in graduate school, not because I am a Chinese-Canadian who grew up in Hong Kong.

This is not to say that my background has no bearing whatsoever on what I am doing now. Indeed, looking back at my formative years in Hong Kong, I am able to identify one aspect of my past which helped to account for my intellectual bearing. As a teenager, I became very interested in the works of the May Fourth generation. This was the generation which brought forth a "cultural revolution" following the formal dissolution of imperial China in 1911.[7] I was most curious as to why these writers were so critical of traditional Chinese culture and why they were so eager about the West--a curiosity which was undoubtedly prompted by the reality that I was living in the British colony of Hong Kong.[8] Through this rather intensive engagement with

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[7] For a classical account of the movement, see Chow Tse-Tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960). A more recent volume, *Perspectives on Modern China: Four Anniversaries*, ed. Kenneth Lieberthal et al. (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1991), contains a superb section on the May Fourth and places the movement in the larger context of modern Chinese history.

[8] The May-Fourth generation of Chinese intellectuals argued that there was no inherent

the May Fourth literature, I became determined that I too had to find out more about the West. Thus when I started university in Canada, I was ready to get into the heart of the matter.

In my intellectual pursuit of the West by way of political philosophy, I did not feel "left out" as I studied the dead white males because I never considered them the only source of knowledge. Perhaps this is why I do not regard the Western intellectual tradition as intrinsically hegemonic. (This is of course not to say that it cannot be hegemonic, both hypothetically and historically.) But as I learned to become a teacher in the heady days of campus politics in the 1990s, I soon realized that I could not teach Western political thought the way I was taught when I was a student in the 1980s.

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contradiction between nationalism and "Westernization." In fact, their view was that advocating westernization was a patriotic act.

The conundrum that I faced was especially poignant because of the fact that I am a woman of visible minority background. I could certainly feel the pressure that somehow I had betrayed my cultural heritage, albeit considered by some as corrupted due to colonialism. Yet I felt equally oppressed by the idea that I should simply abandon my knowledge of Western political thought out of political considerations.[9] I decided that the key to resolving my dilemma is to convey to my students that indeed Western political thought is but one way to think about the political.

[9] I have previously discussed my professional and personal conundrum in an essay entitled 'Teaching the "Canon" from the Perspective of a Woman of Color." See *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol. 30 (March 1997): 7-9.

Clearly the way to achieve this goal is to teach non-Western political thought.[10] But given what I have just said, this would be no solution at all. The challenge for me was to teach Western political thought from a multicultural perspective. As I looked for a solution, I started reconsidering my experience as a student. Given my interest at the time, I don't think that I was ever bothered by the fact that there was no non-Western political thought in any of the courses I took. If there was one thing that bothered me, it was perhaps the fact that there was no effort on the part of the professors to even relate to other intellectual traditions in their lectures for the purpose of illustration. But then again this was not what was expected of professors of European heritage teaching in an area such as political theory in the earlier years of the 1980s.[11]

In retrospect, I was probably constantly juxtaposing Western ideas with Chinese ones in my own mind as I tried to make sense of what I learned in class and from the readings. Of course I had both the interest and the resources to do so. Moreover, even now in my own work I am constantly doing this juxtaposition.[12] It therefore makes sense to share with my students how this

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[10] This is not to say that I don't teach non-western political thought at all. After years of lobbying, I was finally able to get my department to approve a new course in political theory, which is entitled "Human Rights, Ethics and Development." A significant portion of the course is on the "Asian values" debate, in which I assign excerpts of Confucian texts as primary source reading as well as some contemporary work on human rights by Chinese academics and activists.

[11] At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, I never had a professor in political theory who is of visible minority background.

[12] In my book, *Politics and Truth: Political Theory and the Postmodernist Challenge*, I explore the dynamics between politics and truth by examining Plato, Hobbes, Weber, Arendt and Foucault in five major chapters. Based on these analyses, I then move on to a chapter titled "The Politics of Truth in Context: The Case of China," in which I assess the ideological debate on the nature of truth in the early years of the Deng Xiaoping era. See Lee, *Politics and Truth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 141-153. Currently I am studying Chinese political thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The question that guides my work is the relationship between cultural crisis and political identity. I hope this study can shed some

relating to the other can be done regardless of what the subject matter is. What follow are some examples of how I teach from a multicultural standpoint.

In my 300-level feminist theory course, which is offered under the title "Politics and Sexuality," I focus on psychoanalytic feminism and postmodernist feminism. One important set of concepts that students need to learn is clearly the distinction between the private and the public. I therefore start the course with a brief introduction to the debate between Filmer and Locke on the nature of political power, along with short excerpts of their writings. According to Filmer, the Bible points to a natural hierarchy of power on earth based on the order of birth and that the family and the polity are part of the same continuum of this hierarchy. In explaining the rationale behind Filmer's thought, I note that patriarchalism can in fact stand on its own without the Bible. In other words, the point is not that Filmer got the Bible wrong, as Locke has argued in the *First Treatise*. I then proceed to show how aspects of Confucianism can be juxtaposed with Filmer's theory. These include the ideas that age is venerable, that the political order is really the family order writ large, and that man is the patriarch in both orders. At the end of the discussion, I remind my students that I am by no means suggesting that Confucianism and Filmer's patriarchalism are identical. Rather, they both point to what is unique about modern liberalism, which is the delineation of a clear divide between the family and the polity and their respective modes of authority.

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light on contemporary debate of the issue.

In the second part of the same course, I introduce postmodernist feminism by way of volume one of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. In explaining to students Foucault's claim that homosexuality is a historical construct that was specific to the birth of modern Europe, I turn to what to me is an obvious example. This is the fact that homosexuality is not a recognized category of identity in traditional Chinese culture. The idea of homosexuality as identity is only slowly being articulated as such as the country becomes more open to the West. Incidentally, in 1992, *The Globe and Mail*, which is Canada's premier national newspaper, published an article on homosexuals in China.[13] The author, Jan Wong, who was the paper's China correspondent at the time, provided a superb analysis of why the Chinese people, including the Communist regime, are remarkably tolerant of gays and lesbians. It is due to the fact that the Chinese simply do not have the concept of a person being homosexual, as opposed to being heterosexual. In Wong's words,

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[13] Jan Wong, "China: Inside the Closet," *The Globe and Mail*, 14 November 1992, A1 and A14.

> The Communist government repeatedly denies the existence of homosexuality. "When Chinese leaders are asked about it by foreign guests, they always say, 'You have it. We don't," said Dr. Li Yanhe, a Peking University sociologist who recently wrote a book on Chinese gays... But in fact, China has a rich history of homosexuality. Records show that many emperors were homosexual, or at least bisexual, as far back as the Spring-Autumn period (770-475 BC)... Although mainstream culture regarded homosexuality as a form of decadence, *it was considered an act, not an identity*. As long as the indulgence didn't interfere with the procreation of an heir, nobody really minded.[14]

This part of the article contrasts nicely with an important section in Foucault's text, which is cited as follows:

> As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology... The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[15]

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[14] Wong, "China: Inside the Closet," A14; emphasis added.

[15] Foucault, *An Introduction*, vol.1 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (new

I have now incorporated the newspaper article into the course by distributing copies of it to my students when I finish explaining Foucault's point about the significance of the shift from sodomy to homosexuality in the making of modern Europe. I use a few minutes of class time to let the students read the article before opening the floor to discussion. The article has served the class well. It provides students with a contemporary and concrete example to work with, rendering Foucault's argument ironically less abstract. The article does not simply provide students with some much-needed knowledge on Chinese attitude toward sexuality. It importantly shows the contingent nature of sexual identity, which I take to be one of the most important themes in volume one of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.

Although my China course is clearly non-Eurocentric, I bring to the course the same pedagogical approach. When I first designed the course, I called it "Modern China" rather than "Politics of China" because I wanted to be able to emphasize the historical component of the course. About one-third of the course covers China from the mid-nineteenth century to 1949. The pre-1949 period enables me to address the theme of modern China as a history of the encounter of cultures. But I do not romanticize the Chinese culture. While no one is under the illusion anymore that China is some socialist utopia in the making, it is equally important to not treat China as the land of the exotic East. This is not just because China is now well-integrated into the global economy. Rather, China, like any other nations, has a cultural tradition with all its

achievements and flaws.[16]

Thus I do not shy away from discussing the problematic way in which women were treated in that society, and how Confucianism has provided the moral framework for justifying the view that women are inferior to men. Women in China is by far one of the most popular topics among students for their research paper assignment, which is an open assignment with the provision that the chosen topic is approved by me. Some of the best papers from the course have been on this topic. Students have demonstrated rather sophisticated analysis of the status of women under Mao's communism, including the tension between socialism and women's movement. Others focus on more current issues, such as the impact of economic reforms on Chinese women and of course, the one-child policy and its implications.

[16] Here I am in agreement with the view expressed by Walter A. McDougall about how the history of other cultures should be taught. In his words, "...if we are going to teach about other cultures on their own terms, and not just as targets for Western imperialism, then we must stress the bad and ugly as well as the good: the oppression, slavery, and reciprocal racism and brutality among Asian and African peoples themselves." See McDougall, "Merits and Perils of Teaching Cultures," *Orbis*, vol. 43, no. 4 (fall 1999), 602.

Another theme that I address in the course is racism among the Chinese people. Although the Chinese were undoubtedly victims of Western and Japanese imperialism, they are by no means immune from racist prejudices. Certainly the decline of imperial China in the nineteenth century was due in part to failure on the part of the Chinese nation to "decentre" itself, to borrow a postmodernist jargon. This admittedly is a much more sensitive topic given the climate of "political correctness." So far I only had one white woman student who wrote on the subject of Chinese perception of non-Chinese. I remember that she was very anxious when she first asked me if it would be acceptable as a paper topic. By then she had already independently located what is regarded as a groundbreaking book in Chinese studies–*The Discourse of Race in Modern China*.[17] In reading the paper, I sensed that the student walked away from the exercise feeling more "in solidarity" with the Chinese people. For better or for worse they share with her (as a Caucasian) the propensity to be prejudiced toward other races.

III

There are those who may consider what I am trying to do in the classroom as at best a half-hearted attempt to make our curriculum more inclusive and that my so-called multicultural pedagogy is no effort at all given my background. Indeed, my multicultural pedagogy is limited because most of the time I am drawing from one other tradition, which is Chinese. Of course I can defend myself by saying the obvious--that the Chinese civilization is one of the oldest of human civilizations and that the Chinese constitute the largest population in the world. Hence,

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[17] Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

while turning to the Chinese culture may not be sufficiently multicultural, it is certainly significant in terms of providing a credible alternative to Western civilization.

Having said this, I do conceit that perhaps I am limited in another important way. My point about multiculturalism as a pedagogical approach is only aimed at those who are already converted. In other words, I start with the assumption that my audience is in agreement with me, which is that we need to look beyond the West in our teaching, and the whole point of this paper to show you how it can be done. Put differently, I am avoiding the more controversial and arguably, the more fundamental issue, which is indeed the canon debate. However, now that I have laid out my pedagogical approach, I want to return to the canon debate to explain why at the onset, I state that the paper is more concerned with how we teach rather than what we teach.

Rhetoric aside, the whole canon debate is characterized by a certain artificiality which I find profoundly disturbing. Even among those who are in support of going beyond the canon, there is the tendency to compartmentalize cultures and thus rendering multicultural education into some kind of cultural quota system.[18] A case in point is a paper written by Daniel A. Bell, in which he talks about his teaching experience in Singapore.[19] Bell is a political theorist who received his education at McGill University and Oxford University. His most recent book is

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[18] By this I mean the allocation of percentage share to various cultures either in terms of course readings or program requirements. According to the same survey by the AACU mentioned in section I of this paper, cramped in the space of "diversity requirement" are courses ranging from "'Modern China' to 'Contemporary Race Relations in the U. S.'" Against this background, "58 percent of colleges with diversity requirements ask students to take one course, while 42 percent require two or more courses." See Greene, " Diversity Education," A16. Based on this information, the quota system can hardly be considered generous.

[19] Bell, "Teaching in a Multicultural Context: Lessons from Singapore," *Dissent*, vol. 27, no. 2 (spring 2000): 27-33.

entitled *East Meets West: Human Rights and Democracy in East Asia*, in which Bell attempts to work out a middle ground between proponents of "Asian values" and those who maintain that human rights are universal.[20] Given his background, he is certainly well-qualified to talk about multicultural teaching in an ethnically diverse society such as Singapore. Bell's argument in the *Dissent* piece is put succinctly as follows:

> One can be a proponent of Great Works and a multiculturalist–even a radical multiculturalist, to the point that the curriculum is determined by the scholarly traditions of all ethnic groups in the classroom.[21]

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[20] Bell, *East Meets West: Human Rights and Democracy in East Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). My review of the book is in *Review of Politics*, vol.64 (winter 2002): 167-169.

[21] Bell, "Teaching in a Multicultural Context," 27.

The specific course that Bell discusses is a first year "Introduction to Political Theory" course at the National University of Singapore, where English is the teaching medium. Bell's predecessor is also an expatriate who taught the course by using entirely Western sources. In 1991 when Bell took over the course, however, it was clear to him that there ought to be 'greater recognition to Asian "civilizations" in the course curriculum' given that the "general political trend" at the time was to cultivate a "renewed emphasis on ethnic pride and heritage."[22] Without abandoning major Western political thinkers such as Aristotle, Machiavelli and John Stuart Mill, Bell also drew from a line of Chinese political thinkers, ranging from Confucius (551-470 B.C.) to Han Fei (d. 233 B.C.), who was a legalist, to some "Daoist thinkers." Yet in the end Bell was being accused by some unknown student of racism, who said that he was "glorifying Chinese thinkers and denigrating the cultural contributions of Singapore's minority groups."[23] According to Bell, the ethnic components of Singapore are "77 percent Chinese, 14 percent Malay, and 7 percent Indian."[24] Hence, he attempted to address the accusation by dividing the course into four equal portions (that is, Western, Chinese, Muslim and Indian). Happily this time no one complained, including the Chinese who constituted the majority in class. According to Bell, the lesson to draw from his experience is clear--"a teacher should make an effort to design a

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[22] Bell, "Teaching in a Multicultural Context," 29.

[23] Bell, "Teaching in a Multicultural Context," 30.

[24] Bell, "Teaching in a Multicultural Context," 28.

curriculum that draws on the scholarly contributions of all ethnic groups in the class."[25] This to him is "inclusive multiculturalism."

[25] Bell, "Teaching in a Multicultural Context," 32.

Bell's responsiveness to students and his willingness to teach himself (presumably) non-Western thought is admirable. However, to base multicultural teaching on the ethnic composite of a class is problematic, to say the least.[26] To begin, there are some practical problems that even Bell acknowledges. As he puts it, "some classrooms may be so diverse that it isn't feasible to include the scholarly contributions of all ethnic groups." There is also the problem of "how much time should be spent on each tradition," which Bell regards as "petty disputes."[27] But this whole notion of knowledge by way of ethnic representation is fundamentally flawed in principle. It is a view based on the centrality of Western culture and I may add, it is also the white professor's perspective. For if Bell were to be consistent, the "Great Works" should never have been represented in the curriculum in the first place given the ethnic makeup of the classroom.[28] Likewise, if I were to follow Bell's principle of pedagogy, I would rarely have had the chance to talk about the Chinese intellectual tradition with my students as Chinese students are typically missing in my class.[29]

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[26] Bell is clearly not alone on this. According to a survey conducted by the American Council on Education and the American Association of University Professors, 28.7% of the 570 faculty members surveyed indicated that diverse classrooms "caused them to adjust course syllabi" to include racial and ethnic issues. See Peter Schmidt, "Faculty Members Prize Campus Diversity, Survey Finds," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 26 May 2000, A38.

[27] Bell, "Teaching in a Multicultural Context," 32.

[28] Perhaps even more disturbing is the fact that Bell uses the West as the baseline for comparison in that course. He notes that in the "Politics Without Morality" section of the course, he juxtaposes thinkers from the four respective traditions by way of a "Machiavellian checklist." These thinkers, in chronological order, are Kautilya, Han Fei, Khaldun, and Machiavelli. Apparently Han Fei was "the most consistent Machiavellian" and "poor Machiavelli came in last place." (Bell, "Teaching in a Multicultural Context," 31-32). But why should these non-Western thinkers be judged by Machiavellian standards especially since they all predated Machiavelli?

[29] When I offered the course on human rights last winter (see note 9 above), which has a

significant component on the "Asian values" debate, there was no Chinese or any other East Asians in the class. The lack of ethnic diversity among the student body in my courses is not reflective of the ethnic composition of the campus in general. However, based on my own observation (that is, I have never looked at the statistics), most Chinese students at Guelph are in science or professional programs, which of course feeds into the stereotype of what Chinese and more generally, East Asian students are good at. In any case, this observation seems to be in keeping with my own experience as an undergraduate at the University of Toronto in the early 1980s, which even then was already a rather ethnically diverse campus. Yet I only occasionally had an ethnic Chinese as a classmate, especially in upper-level political theory courses.

My point is that who we are does not determine what we teach and what we learn. Commitment to multiculturalism in teaching is not about ensuring that each ethnic group is fairly represented in the curriculum by way of an equal or proportional share of classroom time and the reading lists. To incorporate multiculturalism in our teaching is to be able to step in and out of an intellectual tradition, Western or not. Until one is able to do this, one is still very much trapped in a monolithic culture. This dialogue with the other is an ongoing one that does not stop just because it is time to teach Plato rather than Confucius. Hence, if you happen to be an expert in Western political thought, you cannot simply wait until the next hire to fill in the hole of non-Western thought in your department curriculum. Similarly you may decide to teach yourself another tradition so that you can offer the course yourself. But no matter how hard you try to reinvent yourself as an expert of multiple cultures, some cultures are bound to be left out; some students are bound to be aggrieved. In short, since cultural diversity is literally infinite, I surmise that multiculturalism in learning is best approached as a way to achieve critical thinking rather than as an alternative to the "Great Works." As such, it is the job of every teacher to adopt a multicultural approach in teaching.

IV

Being who I am, I am of course ever mindful that again I have sold out my tradition by invoking concepts such as "dialogue" along with "critical thinking." In the Western tradition, the great practitioner of these exercises is none other Socrates. Martha Nussbaum, in *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, invokes Socrates as the exemplar of an "examined life" to defend her view on how liberal education can be reformed

without devaluing the Western intellectual tradition. In this regard, Nussbaum points out that education must aim at developing critical thinking by way of logical reasoning, which is characterized by the basic Socratic rule of non-contradiction. In asserting this point, Nussbaum attempts to defend Socrates against his "left-wing" postmodernist critics, who charge that "the central forms of logical argumentation don't suit the minds of women, or minorities, or non-Western people." As Nussbaum notes,

> Although these views are sometimes put forward by people who wish to deny full political equality to minorities or to women, their influence in the academy derives from the fact that they are also put forward in a progressive spirit, as if we cannot help disadvantaged groups to make progress unless we recognize the "fact" that logic itself is patriarchal or a tool of colonial oppression.

Nussbaum rightly notes that while this kind of claim is made in the name of making education more inclusive, it in fact displays a patronizing attitude precisely toward those for whom the alleged progressive view professes to speak. In Nussbaum's words, "such criticisms typically show ignorance of the logical traditions of non-Western peoples and a condescending attitude to the logical abilities of women and racial minorities."[30]

Indeed, if we care to look beyond the Greco-Roman tradition, we can easily refute the claim that rational thought is specific to white men. Let me turn again to Confucianism as a case in point. The historical record of Confucianism in cultivating independent critical thinking

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[30] Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard university Press, 1997), 38.

among individuals is questionable. But as Benjamin Schwartz notes:

> There is absolutely no reason for thinking that when Confucius speaks of "thinking for a whole day" he is referring to mystical meditation.... I would conclude that much of the extension of the word *ssu* corresponds well to much of the extension of the word "thought" in Western languages. It may not be a specific "method" of thought in the Socratic mode. It does involve much of what we refer to as "thinking."[31]

It is thus well within the inquisitive tradition of Confucianism when the reform-minded 17th century Neo-Confucian scholar Huang Zongxi (1610-1695) criticized the time-honoured civil service examination. Huang characterized the examination essays as "a debased form of the quotation" of the Confucian classics. Accordingly he warned that the existing system was in effect encouraging candidates to "turn to plagiarism" which would only lead to "a steady decline into superficiality" and "blind acceptance" of the classics. As a remedy, Huang suggested a two-part examination that would test each candidate's knowledge of the classics and his capacity to formulate his own opinion. Accordingly, "those who are ignorant [of the classics and commentaries]" would fail the first part and "those who show themselves to be dull in reasoning" would fail the second.[32]

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[31] Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), 89.

[32] Huang Tsung-hsi (Huang Zongxi), *Waiting for the Dawn: A Plan for the Prince* (Ming-

In pointing out the need for these aspiring scholar-officials to think critically and independently, Huang was following the Confucian imperative that the educated person has a moral obligation to speak out against injustices, especially if they are committed by those in positions of power, including the emperor. Huang himself was engaged in precisely such an activity when he wrote the book *Waiting for the Dawn: A Plan for the Prince*. The book is a comprehensive handbook on reforming the imperial order.[33] It is no accident that Huang was regarded by 'late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reformers and revolutionaries as an early champion of native Chinese "democratic" ideas.'[34] While this may be debatable, there is no doubt that Huang wanted to make the Court more accountable.[35] He noted that " the sage-kings

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[33] De Bary, introduction to *Waiting for the Dawn*, 5-8.

[34] De Bary, preface to *Waiting for the Dawn*, xi-xii.

[35] Beyond defending scholars in speaking out to political authority, Huang did not appear to see the need to argue for the freedom of speech as a general principle. Hence Huang had no qualms in endorsing the school's authority over what people should be reading. Huang notes,

> As for the collected works of contemporary writers, if they are 'classical-style' prose not faithful to a genuine tradition, recorded conversations with no

of old" did not think that schools are for the sole purpose of "training of scholar-officials."

Rather,

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distinctive insights, memorials of no practical benefit, or narratives of no use to historians, they should not be circulated or printed. As for eight-legged examination essays, novels, popular songs, things written for social occasions or ghost writings, the blocks for those already printed should be turned in and burned (*Waiting for the Dawn*,109).

However, Huang was not unique in that there is a long tradition in Chinese culture to regard the educated as the "vanguard" of the people.

> [S]chools were meant to imbue all men, from the highest at court to the humblest in country villages, with the broad and magnanimous spirit of the Classics. What the Son of Heaven thought right was not necessarily right; what he thought wrong was not necessarily wrong. And thus even the Son of Heaven did not dare to decide right and wrong for himself, but shared with the schools the determination of right and wrong.[36]

Accordingly, Huang recommended that "on the first day of each month" the rector of the Imperial College should conduct a policy discussion session, to be attended by the emperor, along with the prime minister and other high-level officials. The emperor is to be seated "among the ranks of the students" and "if there is anything wrong with the administration of the country, the libationer [rector] should speak out without reserve."[37] Similar policy discussion sessions should also be established at the local level as well. Accordingly,

> If minor malpractices appear in the administration of a prefectural or district magistrate, then it should be the school's duty to correct them. If there are serious malpractices, the members of the school should beat the drums and announce it to the people.[38]

Given propositions such as the ones above, it is not at all surprising that the book was not widely

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[36] Huang, *Waiting for the Dawn*, 104.

[37] Huang, *Waiting for the Dawn*, 107.

circulated in its times for fear of suppression by an autocratic regime.

By choosing a Neo-Confucian scholar to express my closing thought, I want to emphasize that the aspiration for critical thinking is neither particularly modern nor Western. That aspiration can be sustained only if we challenge our thought methodically and multiculturalism, which I define as thinking beyond one's cultural framework, is one way to achieve this. At the start of this essay, I claim that it is our moral obligations as teachers to ensure that students' exposure to a multicultural perspective is an ongoing process. It is a moral obligation because thinking is what makes one an engaged human being, capable of taking up the responsibilities of being a member of the human community. Hannah Arendt, one of the greatest political thinkers of our times, made the following observation with regard to Eichmann, who was a former Nazi officer on trial for his war crimes:

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[38] Huang, *Waiting for the Dawn*, 107.

> He *merely*, to put the matter colloquially, *never realized what he was doing*... He was not stupid. *It was sheer thoughtlessness*--something by no means identical with stupidity--that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period.[39]

It is with this important insight into the "banality of evil" that Arendt draws the connection between thinking and one's obligation to humanity. I believe very strongly that education is the key to responsible thinking, which is predicated on our capacity to think critically. To be able to think critically is to be empowered because we have only ourselves to fall back to "when the chips are down."[40] But the classroom is not the venue through which social or political injustices are to be redressed.

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[39] Hannah Arendt, *Eichman in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, rev. & enl. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 287-288; first two emphases in original; third emphasis added.

[40] Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," *Social Research* 38 (autumn 1971): 446.

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